

Mountain Home Veterans  
Administration Medical Center  
Johnson City vicinity  
Washington County  
Tennessee

HAER No. TN-1

HAER  
TENN,  
90-JONCI.V,  
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, DC 20013-7127

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HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

MOUNTAIN HOME VETERANS ADMINISTRATION MEDICAL CENTER  
HAER TN-1

Location: Johnson City vicinity, Washington County, Tennessee

Date of Construction: 1903-1908, with later modifications

Present Owner: Veterans Administration, Washington, DC

Significance: Mountain Home was established in 1901 as the Mountain Branch of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers. The establishment of the Mountain Branch was based on a need to provide for the aging southern Civil War veterans who had remained loyal to the Union and a new generation of veterans, southern and northern, created by the Spanish-American War. The Home Branches appear to be the earliest integrated Federal facilities in the United States.

The earlier Home Branches evolved in programs, architecture, etc., over a number of years. The Mountain Branch, however, was designed and constructed as a complete, architecturally consistent campus with all main patient and support buildings constructed between 1903 and 1908. The only comparable Branch was the Battle Mountain Sanatorium, also designed as a complete campus by a prominent architect at the same time.

ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The Mountain Branch was designed by New York architect, J.H. Freeland in the Beaux Arts style, which includes such fine details as full relief busts of Athena and solid brass key latches ornamented by lion heads. The station is frequently misattributed to Stanford White, the most prominent "popular" name in the classic styles of the period. Staff quarters on the grounds are fine examples of the military style of quarters of the late Victorian period.

All of the Home Branches, like the Mountain Home, signify the change with the Civil War in the Federal program of veterans benefits from total reliance on pensions and land grants. The latter had been made obsolete by passage in 1862 of the Homestead Act.

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The Home Branches, with chapels, theatres, farms, shops, employment opportunities, libraries, and schools appear to be the first Federal entrance into planned communities, and possibly the first non-religious planned communities in the nation.

Many of the training, medical, rehabilitative and other programs presaged the post-World War II veterans' benefits programs by almost 80 years.

With eligibility based on honorable service alone, the Home Branches provided for all Civil War veterans, black as well as white, and appear to be the earliest integrated Federal facilities in the history of this country. By contrast, the Armed Services were not integrated until the Truman Administration and the Veterans Administration during the Eisenhower years.

Through the twilight of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), the Home Branches were a significant political factor in State, local, and national elections. The concentration (1,000 to 3,000 members) of Old Soldiers at the Home Branches could determine the decision vote in local Congressional Districts and the margin (when combined with "civilian" Old Soldiers) on State and national ballots. The stand against Grover Cleveland by the GAR (which had active posts at all Home Branches) for his veto of pension bills are considered a major factor in his defeat by Benjamin Harrison.

A study of the selection of sites for the Home Branches, award of contracts for design, construction, procurement, officer's assignments, etc., provides a fascinating profile of the commercial and political ethics of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

#### ARCHEOLOGY

Mountain Home is located in an area well documented to be rich in aboriginal archeological resources. While no survey has been conducted to date, we are currently initiating a full station survey in anticipation of several major projects at the Center.

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PHOTOGRAPHS

Historic American Engineering Record  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

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# HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

## MOUNTAIN HOME VETERANS ADMINISTRATION MEDICAL CENTER TN-1

Date: 1903-1908, with later modifications

Location: Johnson City Vicinity, Washington County, Tennessee

Architect/  
Builder: J.H. Freeland, Architect

Owner: Veterans Administration, Washington, D.C.

Significance

The Mountain Home is laid out on two primary axes running roughly north-south and east-west. The east-west axis is comprised of Dogwood, Magnolia, Maple and Memorial Avenues (from south to north), with Dogwood forming the primary east-west line. It terminates to the east in the hospital complex, and to the west at the Administration Building. The area to the north contains most of the buildings within the reservation. The area to the south is comprised primarily of parkland and gardens, and also includes a bandstand. The main Home residences are in the area between Dogwood and Memorial Avenues. The area to the north of Memorial Avenue has support facilities such as shops and maintenance areas, and the Chapel and Memorial Hall (theater). The Home Cemetery (a National Cemetery) is to the north of these structures.

The North-South axis runs from the boiler plant, through the mess hall, flag pole, and commemorative obelisk to the west edge of the lake. The arrangement of buildings to the east and west of this axis is not symmetrical, but a balance is created in the wide spaced placement of symmetrical buildings. Service buildings and staff quarters are located to the east of the hospital and to the west of the administration building. Farm and dairy operations were originally conducted on almost 200 acres of land beyond the present western boundary of the Reservation. Most of the buildings which are no longer standing were farm and service buildings. In addition, two TB buildings which were not part of the original construction, and were not stylistically related, have been demolished. There have been few intrusions, and the site maintains most of its historic integrity.

Buildings 1 and 2, designed by Freeland and built in 1903-1905, and Building 8, built in 1932 to match, are almost identical and consist of three stories and full basements. They are detached and rectangular in shape with smaller octagonal shaped wings on each end. The masonry and red and white common bond brick construction on the first and second floors is supported by cut stone exterior walls at the half exposed basement level. The third floor is primarily a medium truncated hip slate roof with two types of dormer windows, some gabled with returns and smaller hooded dormers with half-round windows.

The central main entry, on the south facade, features a portico reached by straight steps fanning out at the bottom, flanked by two story horizontally ridged white brick pilasters, each embellished with a Baroque terra cotta medallion. Just inside the pilasters is a pair of ionic columns. The wood and glass paneled double doors, with an elliptical mullioned transom, are framed in stone molded trim, and topped by an arch with radiating brick voussoires and a Baroque-style terra cotta keystone. The slate roof has a continuous cornice with brackets at the eaves, around the main building, portico, and wings. There are fancy, scroll-type brackets at the center section. In 1958, a brick finished mechanical room was constructed in the center section of each building roof.

On Buildings 1 and 2, the windows at the octagonal wings are double hung. The windows have narrow sidelights separated from the main windows by mullions and on the first floor, they are topped by elliptical white brick arches with terra cotta keystones. The wing windows on Building 8 are more simple with red brick arches; several windows are bricked-up. On the front and back facades, there are shallow stone shelves with supporting consoles above the first floor double hung windows.

A continuous stone sill below the first floor windows and a stone band at the first floor level run around each building. At every corner and window jamb are massive white brick quoins, leaving smaller irregular patches of red brick between them.

Today, the buildings are used as domiciliaries with bed wards. The ends of the long rectangular buildings have large open, but sometimes partitioned rooms. The central interior hall features a three story lobby with a skylight in the roof.

Building 8 is connected to Building 78 by a basement level underground corridor on the east end of the building.

Buildings 1 and 2 are situated slightly in front of and to either side of Building 34, a towered building that is a central focal point of the medical center. Building 8 is to the east of Building 2.

Buildings 3, 5, 6, and 7 are all used as domiciliaries or bed wards for patients. Building 4 is used for arts and recreation activities. The identical oblong buildings, constructed of masonry and red Flemish bond brick, feature a two-story central entry portico and a one story covered porch, supported by brick columns, that runs the entire front of each building. The third story, an attic, is under a medium truncated hip slate roof periodically accented by half round windows in hooded dormers.

This same roof extends over the two story entrance portico, that is supported by red brick pilasters and columns. On the second floor above the entry, within the pilasters, is a balcony with railings, that has brick arches with stone keystones on the sides overlooking the roof of the porch across the front. The balcony's double doors are framed by paned glass sidelights and transom. The main double doors directly below have paned glass and wood panels with a straight mullioned transom above. The entry is reached by a set of straight steps with two free standing metal railings.

There are single doors centered on each side of the portico on Building 6 only. The plain double hung windows around the entire building have small stone sills.

Buildings 4 and 6 have added brick stair towers on both ends of the buildings about 1975.

Transmitted by: Monica E. Hawley, Historian, 1984